

4/15/2009 Moran Requests Timely CRP Announcement from USDA

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman Jerry Moran today requested that U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack make a final announcement as timely as possible about whether extensions will be offered to expiring 2009 Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts. Moran recommended the Secretary approve targeted contract extensions for expiring CRP contracts.

"Kansas producers have been able to conserve soil, water and land resources with the help of CRP contracts," Moran said. "Having these contracts available to farmers with land most at-risk for soil erosion is vital to successfully continue the conservation of our state resources. More importantly, USDA needs to make a timely decision about its intentions with expiring 2009 CRP contracts so farmers can make responsible management decisions."

Moran's letter to Secretary Vilsack also requested that the contract extension include the most environmentally sensitive acres to remain in CRP until a general signup can be initiated.

Moran was prompted to write a letter to Sec. Vilsack requesting contract extensions following his recent ninth conservation tour and recent Annual Listening tour stops. During his conservation tour stops, the topic of expiring 2009 CRP contracts came up as farmers and ranchers discussed conservation practices implemented in Kansas.

Please see below for Moran's letter to Agriculture Secretary Vilsack:

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Kansans have a long tradition of conserving their soil, water, and wildlife resources. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is an integral part of those efforts. Recently, I held my ninth conservation tour to highlight conservation practices being implemented in Kansas. During my conservation tour and at town hall meetings I have held across the state, an often asked question was: "What will happen to the CRP contracts that expire on September 30, 2009?"

Under the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, total acres allowed to be maintained in CRP were reduced from 39.2 million acres to 32 million acres nationwide, beginning in fiscal year 2010. While the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) should follow Congress' mandate to reduce total enrollment, it should not simply force all expiring 2009 CRP acres to exit the program. Some of these acres are suitable for agricultural production and should be allowed to return to either cropland or pastureland. Other expiring acres, however, are highly erodible and should be retained in the CRP program. According to USDA data, approximately 3.9 million acres will expire at the end of the 2009 fiscal year. With total enrolled CRP acres near 33.6 million acres during fiscal year 2009, this leaves USDA with authority to retain a significant number of acres in CRP that are most at-risk for soil erosion.

On March 25, 2009, Bob Stephenson, Acting Deputy Administrator for Field Operations, Farm Service Agency (FSA), testified before the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Energy, and Research. Mr. Stephenson told the Subcommittee that FSA would not hold a CRP general signup in fiscal year 2009. In conversation with Mr. Stephenson after the hearing, I learned that despite its decision not to allow a general signup, FSA was considering whether to offer one-year extensions to some of the expiring 2009 contracts. Mr. Stephenson cautioned me that no decision had been made, but that it was being considered.

I ask that you allow targeted contract extensions to expiring 2009 CRP contracts. Such an extension should allow for the most environmentally sensitive acres to remain in CRP until a general signup can be initiated.

I also urge you to make a final announcement concerning whether an extension will be offered to expiring 2009 CRP contracts as soon as possible. As you know, Kansas grows a significant amount of winter wheat. It is expected that many of the expiring CRP acres will return to wheat production if producers are not given an option to continue participation in the CRP program. Under existing rules, farmers may begin to prepare land for fall planted crops as early as May 1, 2009, for expiring 2009 contracts. It is essential farmers have a clear signal about how USDA plans to deal with the expiring 2009 CRP contracts before the May 1st date.

Thank you for considering my request and I look forward to hearing your expeditious response.

Very truly yours,

Jerry Moran

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